

How is the relative assessment of merit of individuals for a job done?

The aim of any assessment process is to get the best person for the job. Jobs are advertised with specific job requirements and applicants are requested to supply specific kinds of information which referees nominated by them can vouch for and amplify. Nominations by knowledgeable individuals are invited as there are good people who do not apply because of several reasons. A search committee is appointed for suggesting to the appointing authorities the names of the likely best people for the job. It often happens that the person selected for the post of professor or head of a department or institution is not the most eminent but he is the most likely to take the department or institution he heads forward not only by introducing new blood and vigor but also by dealing with what is best described as 'dead wood'. In some countries there are some rigid rules which, in my opinion, are very useful. For example, in the Federal Republic of Germany, it is almost impossible to appoint a person working in a department as the Head of the same department (Grade IV Professor). The head of the department has to come from some outside University. In any case, once the final selection is made no one can contest the selection and it is unthinkable that a stay order by the Law Courts can be given against the appointment in Western countries as happens in India. The situation in India is..... what shall I say? In India, Law Courts can even give stay orders for award of prizes for scientific work. Do they think they are in a more suitable position to judge the fairness of awards made by established scientists? I wonder what Prof. B.P. Pal would think if some contestant brought in a stay order for the award of a prize for the best rose in a rose show! The situation has become ridiculous in India. In fact, it is so bad that I know of several well known medical scientists who refuse to serve on the selection committee of a medical institution of a particular state because they say "what is the use—after all somebody will get a stay order against our decisions". I think the University Grants Commission (UGC) should conduct an enquiry to find out in how many cases the stay order was justified and if so, to suggest

Instance of selection of DG, ICAR. One DDG took the case to CAT which stayed the appointment that UPSC cannot select a scientist.

corrective steps in the selection process in the Universities and Research Institutions because I have come to know that stay orders have been passed against certain appointments in Research Institutions of the CSIR also. On the other hand, I have some good news for you because Dr. A.P. Mitra, Director-General, CSIR, has managed to broaden the selection process. There is some opposition to what he has done, because he has removed the usual Ph.D. requirements for senior posts. In the case of the post of a Head of a CSIR Institute, he wrote as follows:

"For this job, we would like to have scientists who are creative, innovative and are well-established scientists/technologists. We would like them to have distinguished record of achievements in the broad areas of Earth System Sciences, a broad scientific and technical vision, a demonstrated ability to create an environment conducive to nurturing of high class R&D and a proven track record of interpersonal skills and an ability to communicate effectively. What is important is the achievements and eminence in the area of operation of the laboratory and suitability of the scientists for the job; the initial academic degree can be in any discipline leading on to these programmes of activities and need not be limited to Geophysics. Similarly, while doctorate or post-graduate degree in Engineering is expected, it is neither necessary nor relevant in a highly interdisciplinary field to insist on this for outstanding scientists. Therefore, while making your recommendations you may take suitability into account and not necessarily his initial academic degree".

What a refreshing change from the old outdated practice! I congratulate Dr Mitra for introducing this change. I know there will be opposition but that will not matter in the long run.

I would like to end this talk on this forward looking change by Dr. Mitra but before I do so, I would like to ask whether I have in this talk been able to suggest to you any way to deal with the problem, I started out in this lecture. I have given you